



# Nadezhda Savova

Born in Sofia, Bulgaria, Nadezhda Savova was named after her grandmother, a name with a translation that has given meaning and drive to her life — hope. She moved to the United States where she excelled in college, eventually entering the PhD program at Princeton. As a result of volunteer and internship work with global organizations, Nadezhda realized that global issues begin at the local level, and she sought a way to introduce art and culture as motivators for change. She founded The International Council for Cultural Centers (I3C), and through the I3C she started The Bread Houses Network: a program where the art of making bread unites people across all boundaries. This philanthropic young woman has definitely lived up to her name, bringing hope to people all over the world.





My fondest childhood memories are connected to food. Growing up, I was blessed to have four generations of amazing women nurture me with food, both physically and spiritually: my mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-great-grandmother. I remember my great-grandmother, Baba Raina, frying dough dumplings called buhtichki — the aroma would attract kids from around the neighborhood like a magnet. My mother's mother, Baba Mina, was an opera singer, and I remember her singing opera arias in Italian while concocting all kinds of amazing deserts, like praskovki ("peaches"): small pieces of dough formed to look like a plump peach. Perhaps the most formative person in my life is my mother, Darina. My favorite memories are of Christmas celebrations when I would help her prepare the nine traditional Bulgarian dishes. My favorite of all nine was the sodena pitka, a round soda bread. I will never forget the bread's aroma filling the house, mixed with the incense that is ritually burnt as a symbol of the prayer of thanksgiving to God for all things in life. Bread was a key ingredient to our daily life in Bulgaria, and its religious significance puts it at the core of Bulgarian culture and other Christian Orthodox cultures.

When I was young I loved the Disney movie "Pocahontas" so much that I longed to come to America and develop the freedom of spirit and connection to nature that the Native American princess had. After studying day and night for the SAT exams, I got a full scholarship to Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, where I spent four amazing years discovering new horizons, learning Spanish, spending semesters abroad, and interning with the United Nations and other global organizations.

It was while traveling around the world for internships and volunteering that I truly realized my fascination for bread. I was always drawn to the bakeries — special places of warmth and aroma that felt like anchors of home and hope. In my eyes, bakeries became the quintessential hubs of humanity, globally present and culturally diverse.

## Favorite Quote

"Let chastity be portrayed in your eyes and in your ears the sound of truth. Imprint your tongue with the word of life and upon your hands [imprint] all alms. Stamp your footsteps with visiting the sick, and let the image of your Lord be portrayed in your heart."

— St. Ephrem the Syrian







## Bogovitza (“A Gift to God”) — Traditional Bulgarian Easter Bread

In Bulgaria, the first piece of the bogovitza bread was always put aside symbolically in prayer for Christ and the Virgin Mary to share with us at the festive table. The piece is kept all year round and then given to the birds the next year when a new piece replaces it.

- 1 cube yeast
  - 1 tsp. sugar
  - Warm water
  - 1 kg. white flour
  - 1 tsp. salt
  - 3 eggs
  - 3 teacups of lukewarm milk
1. Combine yeast and sugar in a small bowl, and fill to top with warm water. Set in a warm place to rest and ferment for about 15 minutes; it is ready when the liquid starts rising and bubbling.
  2. Sift flour into a bowl, and add salt. Make a well, and add eggs. Gradually add milk to well, stirring gently to avoid lumps; do not allow liquid to spill over brim of well.
  3. Cover dough with a cotton or linen towel (in Bulgaria, a special hand-embroidered cloth called “mesal” is used), and let rise for 1 hour in a warm place.
  4. Knead dough, form the bread, and place on a tray dusted with flour. Decorate top of bread with a cross and a spiral in the center of the cross. (In pre-Christian times, the cross represented the four points of the universe and the four elements of nature. When later adopted into Christianity, the cross acquired new meaning as the key symbol of the resurrection.)
  5. Bake for about 40 minutes at 180 degrees Celsius. Remove from oven and cover with same cloth to rest for an hour before eating. This bread is traditionally eaten by dipping it in honey, since honey is symbol of the joy from the shared love in the collective celebration.







# Proshpora — Sacred Church Bread

Makes 6 breads

This bread is made with prayer for the church and is used for the Holy Communion (Eucharist) in the Orthodox Church. It has only three ingredients, symbolic of the Holy Trinity.

- 1 kg. white flour, plus extra
- 1 tsp. salt
- Boiling water
- Warm water
- 1 cube yeast

1. Sift flour into a bowl, and add salt. Gradually pour boiling water over flour; stir continuously, avoiding lumps, adding more water until you get a sticky but firm consistency. Let dough cool for about 10 minutes.
2. Combine yeast and warm water in a small bowl. (No sugar is added because this ritual bread only has the key Biblical elements: salt, flour, and yeast.) Set in a warm place to rest and ferment for about 30 minutes. Add yeast to cool dough, and gradually add about one small bowl of flour until dough becomes shape-able (be careful dough does not get too dry or too hard).
3. Dust a baking tray with flour. (In monasteries, the trays were covered with beeswax because it produced the best texture for bottom crust.) Cut dough into 6 pieces and shape into small balls. Cut each ball in half, and

place two parts on top of each other (this symbolizes Christ as both fully God and fully Man). (Traditionally, a wooden, hand-carved proshpora bread seal is then pressed into the dough. Holes are made with a toothpick in the corners of the stamped image so it does not break from bubbles that might arise.)

4. Bake for about 40 minutes at 180 degrees Celsius and watch carefully. (Traditionally, the bread is covered with a bit of water and a clean towel, and is taken as a gift to the church, where one is used for the altar to become the body of Christ and the rest are spread among the community at the end of the service.)

## Tip

Love is the most important ingredient, both in bread and in life. This is not just a simple metaphor, but a tangible reality clearly shown by the life of St. Prohor of Kiev, a monk who lived in the 12th century. I consider him the spiritual protector of my work with bread as a practice of giving, sharing, and healing together.







Where Women Cook would like to thank Nadezhda Savovoa for her involvement in our Winter Issue. To learn more, visit [breadhousesnetwork.org](http://breadhousesnetwork.org), [international3c.org](http://international3c.org), or the Bulgarian Bread Houses site at [bread-art-house.org](http://bread-art-house.org).

Around the time that I earned my BA in international relations, I realized that global issues could only truly be solved through local changes, so I decided to shift my focus to anthropology; I was drawn to its emphasis on humanity as a multitude of unique persons, rather than masses of numbers and statistics. I was accepted into the anthropology PhD program at Princeton, and dedicated myself to the research of how the arts can be an engine for social change on a local level, in particular in poor and violent neighborhoods where one would least expect beauty, but where creativity is one of the most powerful motivations for change. I started thinking about bread-making as an art form that could be collectively created, experienced, and shared to unite people across boundaries.

In 2008 I founded The International Council for Cultural Centers (I3C), a global network uniting national networks of community cultural centers. The Bread Houses Network is one of I3C's main programs that I developed. It establishes community centers, or Bread Houses, where bread-making is the key communal art activity, which is then linked to other art forms like poetry, music, and theater. I had envisioned a warm, comfortable place that welcome to people of all ages, economic classes, colors, and cultures, where all would be united around one hearth, one table. There are now Bread Houses in 14 countries, on five continents.

The Bread Houses have introduced people that would never have met otherwise, forming a dialogue among generations. In the Bread House programs around the world, elderly people have made bread with so-called "anti-social" youth, such as gang members in Harlem or urban youth in Brighton Beach, New York, forming relationships reminiscent of grandparent and grandchild. The program also provides a highly therapeutic experience for people who have endured trauma. I have made bread in Harlem with women and men recently out of prison who've shared that the process awakened forgotten childhood and family memories, which helped them to discover sources of gentleness and goodness within themselves they had forgotten or had not realized were hidden inside.

The vision for the Bread Houses is that they will also evolve as social enterprises or bakeries that can employ underprivileged people. By making and selling breads from different parts of the world, and educating people about the beauty and diversity of bread as the most basic global food, the Bread Houses will also serve to preserve cultural traditions. Over the next two years, I will be working on establishing Bread House social enterprise prototypes in the U.S. and in Bulgaria, and am currently forming teams of people in both countries.

